From: Elizabeth Morra
To: Christy Agner
Subject: Weekly Federal Recap for January 23, 2026
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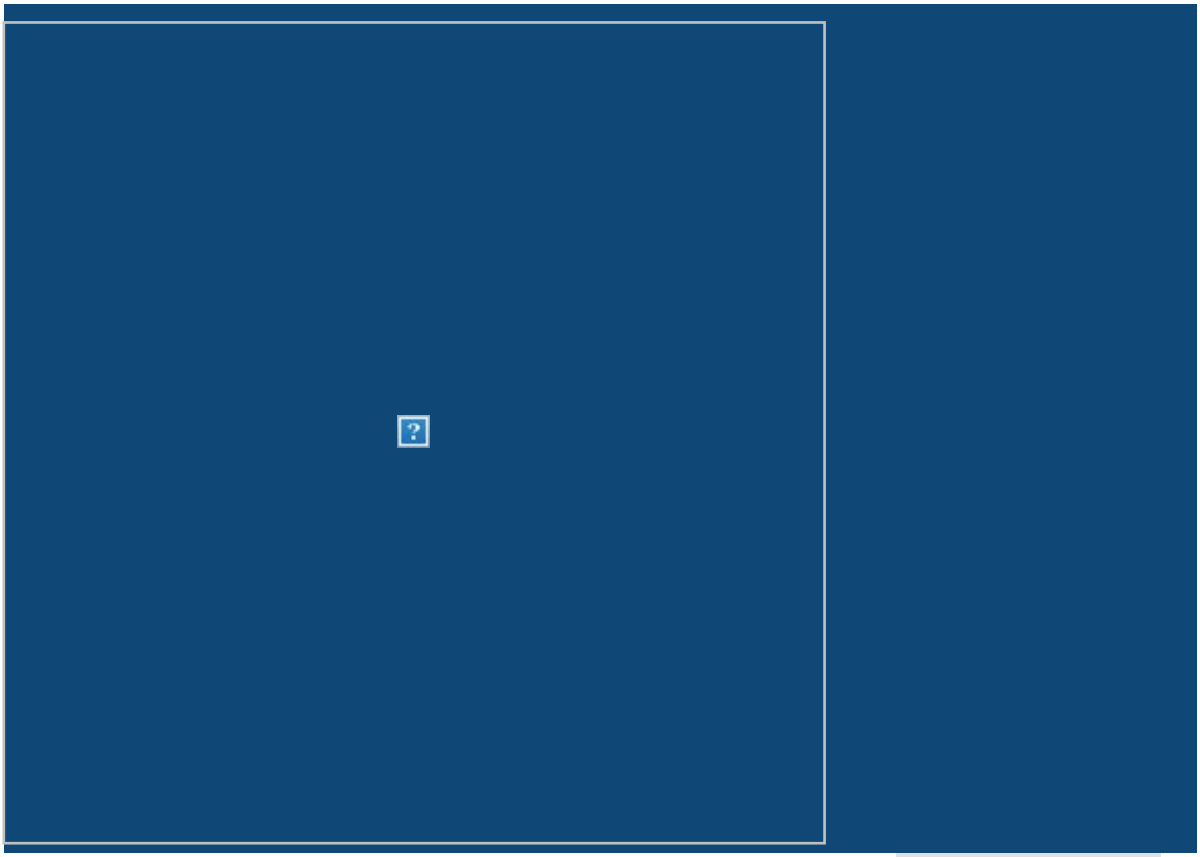

January 23, 2026

Weekly Federal Recap

A weekly update on federal legislative topics impacting higher education.

House Successfully Completes All Annual Appropriations Bills, Senate Will Vote Next Week as CR Deadline Approaches

- On a largely bipartisan vote of 341-88 the House passed a three-bill minibus yesterday, which included the two largest funding bills: LHHS-Education and Defense, along with Transportation-HUD.
- Members also separately approved the Homeland Security appropriations bill, which had proved controversial due to funding and policies related to ICE.
- These were the four remaining FY26 spending bills, meaning Congress returned to regular order this year and has succeeded in producing all 12 appropriations bills with bipartisan and bicameral support.
- The House recessed last night to allow members to travel home in advance of the impending snowstorm and the House will be out next week.

The Senate was in recess this week, so will return next week to vote on the four bills, which will be packaged together along with State, Foreign Operations and Financial Services, approved by the House last week – in all a six-bill minibus.

- Leaders are hoping the expected snowstorm won't affect the ability of senators to return to Washington, DC next week, as the current continuing resolution (CR), expires next Friday.
- If senators fail to complete the last six-bill minibus next week, Congress will need to pass a new CR to cover the remaining six bills.
- Minibus bill text, summaries by subcommittee prepared by appropriations staff (majority and minority versions), joint explanatory statements, and community project funding tables.

Higher Education Funding Mostly Flat-Funded in Final Bill; Rebukes Administration Terminations and Efforts to Dismantle Education Department (Courtesy Politico, APLU and other sources)

- The LHHS-Education portion of the three-bill minibus that passed the House yesterday funds the Education Department at $79 billion ($217 million over the previous year), mostly preserves programs at last year's levels, and rebukes the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the Education Department.
- The White House said Thursday, in a statement of administration policy, that President Donald Trump's senior advisers would recommend he sign the spending package into law. The statement said it's "pleased" Congress is avoiding "a bloated omnibus package."
- The bill includes language that states the Education Department has "no authorities" to transfer its responsibilities to other agencies across the federal government, a compromise after Democrats pushed for language that would block the department from offloading its programs across the federal government through interagency agreements.
- It also requires the Education Department to distribute a string of formula grants, including funding to support high-poverty schools, special education, career and technical education, and other programs, by their July 1 obligation date. That language comes after the Trump administration withheld nearly $7 billion in education funding last summer, which was eventually released.
- **Higher education:** The bill includes funding for a number of higher education programs that had been reduced or eliminated in previous proposals.
- The bill includes $22.5 billion for the Pell Grant, maintaining the maximum award at $7,395.
- Other highlights of the LHHS-Education bill include:
    - **Federal Student Aid and Other Department of Education Programs:** The bill rejects the outright elimination of higher education priorities. In addition to flat funding Pell Grants, accounts poised for elimination in the President's budget (SEOG, TRIO, GEAR UP, CCAMPIS, and Federal Work Study) are also flat funded.
    - Instead of being eliminated, Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) is funded at $19.5m (a 17% cut).
    - Funding for other Department of Education programs includes: the Postsecondary Student Success Grant (flat) at $45 million, Title VI International Education (6% cut) and the Institute of Education Sciences (0.6% cut).
    - Basic Needs grants are flat funded at $10 million, and $15 million is included for HBCU and MSI Research and Development Infrastructure Grants.
- **National Institutes of Health (NIH):** The NIH is funded at $48.716 billion (approx.

$400 million increase to the agency topline, compared to FY25). The bill contains policy language on F&A, blocking the Administration's proposed cap.
- APLU's tracker of F&A language in appropriations bills has been updated.
- NIH Language: The bill also contains policy language (Section 240) to address the forward-funding issue with a general provision to limit the amount of funds that can be obligated for awards that fully fund out-year commitments and directs NIH to fund as many new awards as possible based on meritorious applications.

Minibus Includes Small Increase for Defense Research and Development (Courtesy APLU)

- As part of the three-bill minibus, the Department of Defense is funded at $838.7 billion, an $8.4 billion increase over FY25.
- $145.9 billion, a 3% increase, is directed to Research, Development, Test and Evaluation for the military services.
- The bill contains policy language on F&A (Section 8026) and report language in the explanatory statement (page 21). The language is essentially supportive of the FAIR model and blocks the Administration's efforts to impose new caps on F&A for federal research.

UNC System Community Project Funding included in Appropriations Bills

- Several UNC System universities are slated to receive community project funding in the completed funding bills for FY26. They include:
  - **Elizabeth City State University:** $3.9 million purchase of aviation equipment (Sen. Tillis)
  - **University of North Carolina Pembroke**: $1 million, Old Main renovation (Rep. Rouzer)
  - **Fayetteville State University:** $345,631, Detecting PFAS + Pesticides in Cape Fear River Basin (Rep. Rouzer)
  - **University of North Carolina Wilmington:** $1.25 million, Mid-Atlantic Flood Mitigation + Coast Resilience Program (Rep. Rouzer)
  - **East Carolina University:** $6.5 million, biomanufacturing education, including equipment (Sen. Tillis)
  - **East Carolina University:** $254,856, Police Dept software upgrades (Rep. Murphy)
  - **UNC Health**: $316,000 SECU Family House at UNC Hospitals for facilities and equipment (Sen. Tillis)
  - **Programmatic Funding**: **UNC System:** $4 million, Pathfinder Airborne (multiple champions)

House Passes Pregnant Students' Rights Act (Courtesy Politico)

- Yesterday, the House passed the Pregnant Students' Rights Act largely along party lines on a vote of 217-211.
- H.R. 6359 mandates that colleges notify pregnant students about their rights to modified class schedules and excused absences for doctor appointments, as well as campus and community resources to support their pregnancies and how to report discrimination.
- The federal education law Title IX bars sex-based discrimination, including for pregnant and parenting students.
- The Senate has not taken up the bill.

Senate Education Committee Chairman Seeks Math Data (Courtesy Politico)

- Yesterday, Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-La.) sent a letter to 35 selective U.S. colleges and universities asking for data about which undergraduate math courses students are placed in.
- The schools have until Feb. 5 to provide the data. The goal is to better understand the root cause of the decline in student preparedness for collegiate level math courses.
- The letter cites a November report from the University of California, San Diego, which found that the share of their students placed into remedial math grew from less than 1% of the 2020 entering class to more than 11% in 2025.
- "The United States faces a crisis in student achievement at the K-12 level that has begun to spill over into higher education, especially in math," Cassidy wrote. "This state of affairs is unacceptable and demands immediate corrective action."
- The inquiry was sent to schools in both red and blue states. Schools under scrutiny of the administration, such as Columbia and Harvard, received letters — as well as those on friendlier terms, like Vanderbilt and Washington University in St. Louis.

Education Department Official Says New Accountability Measures Here to Stay (Courtesy Politico)

- Education Undersecretary Nicholas Kent expressed confidence that the latest iteration of accountability measures from the Education Department are here to stay.
- The agency reached an agreement earlier this month on how to implement accountability measures that aim to keep students — and federal financial aid — away from expensive programs that lead to low paying jobs.
- The accountability measures, known as the Gainful Employment rule, have been implemented by past administrations and faced several lawsuits throughout the years.
- The most recent suit came from a trade association representing cosmetology schools that claimed the rule was flawed and threatened the very existence of cosmetology programs. But a judge ruled in favor of the Education Department in October, refusing to overturn the rule.
- During the rulemaking period, some negotiators expressed concerns that the new version of the rule could also be challenged in courts. Others worried a future administration might come in and completely change everything creating what is known as "regulatory whiplash."
- But Kent said the new rule may be insulated from that because he has something his predecessors didn't: consensus. (Although, it was a close call.)
- "I think here consensus is on our side," he said on the Career Education Colleges and Universities' podcast. "The department has never reached consensus on this type of accountability structure, especially in the last 15 years. We have gone back and forth with Gainful Employment and Financial Value Transparency, and none of those administrations reached consensus."

Upcoming Events of Interest

*House is in recess next week; Senate is in session

2026 NHA Annual Meeting & Humanities Advocacy Day
March 8-10, 2026
National Humanities Alliance
Registration Required
This event will provide an opportunity to connect with other passionate humanities advocates from around the country. During the Annual Meeting, the National Humanities

Alliance will explore approaches to year-round advocacy on college campuses and in local communities, while also preparing for visits to Capitol Hill. On Humanities Advocacy Day, participants meet with House and Senate offices to make a persuasive case for federal funding for the humanities.

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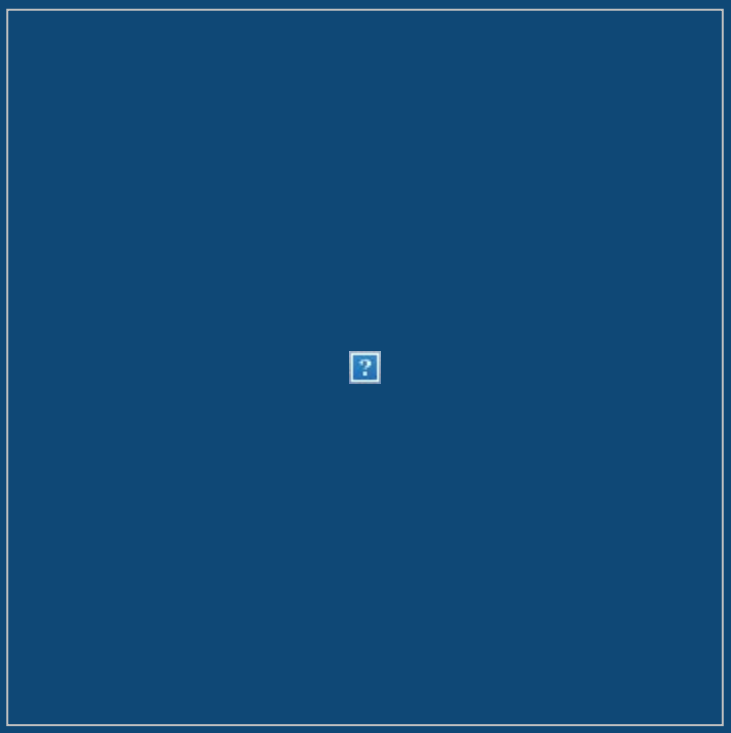

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